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"Not to be ministered unto, but to minister"

WAR SUFFERERS' RELIEF BULLETIN

December, 1946 **Vol II, No. 10**

The People Have a Gnawing Hunger

By Robert S. Kreider

. . . "that bread should be so dear, and flesh and blood so cheap!"—Thomas Hood. . . . . I see a ragged lad steal from an open truck a large cabbage. A father sends his children onto the streets to pick up cigarette butts—these to be exchanged for turnips. A maiden sells her virtue for a bar of chocolate. They who dwell in cities live in a wasteland of wreckage. Hopelessness and apathy chain down their spirits. In this Germany of 1946 no problem of life looms larger than the aching, seeking, all-consuming quest for daily bread and shelter. And even now that war has long since ended on European soil, life is cruelly cheap.

Eleven and four-tenths per cent of all babies born in this province of Greater Hesse die at birth or soon thereafter. The city of Hanau reports that the mortality rate for persons over seventy years of age is now twenty-six per cent, an increase from eleven per cent in prewar years. In Kassel nearly 1,000 children show signs of rickets. The Medical Director of Province Greater Hesse states: "In school the malnutrition leads the children to fatigue quickly. The teachers complain that pupils lose their ability to concentrate even with short lessons . . . . Anemia has made a sharp increase . . . . Also startling are the highly nervous children."

Adding to the plight of the land is the influx of thousands of refugees expelled from the East. There are now more hungry mouths at the table. With the bomb damage, the return of prisoners of war, the arrival of refugees—the housing situation is alarming. An average of 1.63 persons are housed in each habitable room in Greater Hesse. In the city of Kassel the population density is four persons per room.

Mennonite Gifts

This is the Germany of 1946 unto whose needs our Mennonite Central Committee now seeks to minister. Our churches have given liberally, with the result that the M.C.C. is one of the major relief contributors to Germany. In the American Zone our contributions have flowed to Evangelisches Hilfswerk, the relief agency of the German Protestant Church. To illustrate the operation of this program, let us trace the journey of twenty tons of white flour given by a community in Kansas. The flour is shipped to New York City where it is loaded on a ship, the S/S "American Farmer." Twelve days later the ship arrives in bomb-ravaged Bremen, the U.S. port of entry for Germany. The flour is unloaded and stored temporarily in the C.R.A.L.O.G. warehouse, Bremen. Several days later the sacks of flour are loaded into small European freight cars. The shipment moves by rail south across the British Zone and to Frankfurt. In Frankfurt the twenty tons are received into an Evangelisches Hilfswerk warehouse. The warehouse is a huge, thick-walled concrete structure—a wartime air raid bunker. The shipment is allocated among three subdistricts—ten tons going to District Wiesbaden where the Mennonite flour is stored inside an old chapel.

Selecting Areas of Need

A capable, highly-dedicated staff of workers gives direction to the relief work in Wiesbaden. They have surveyed the field of need in their district and have

decided that the limited relief supplies at their disposal will be sent especially to certain areas: bombed-out cities, regions where agriculture is unproductive, industrial regions where there is no farming or gardening, regions with high T.B. rates, and large cities where the rate of child malnutrition is high.

Except in rural districts, hunger is universal. To whom, then, shall this flour be distributed? The Wiesbaden office of Evangelisches Hilfswerk has instructed their co-workers in the field to give preferential consideration for the needs of the following: the acutely ill, those recuperating from serious illness, pregnant mothers, undernourished children whose health is endangered, tubercular patients, and ill or undernourished babies.

The Local Relief Committee

Evangelisches Hilfswerk has committees established in each community charged with the responsibility of distributing equitably relief supplies. The local committee is composed of five members: the pastor of the parish, a representative of the church council, a representative of the refugees, a physically handicapped person, and the community nurse (responsible for the whole welfare work).

The work of this committee is not easy. They must investigate need, especially of the "modest poor" who are reluctant to request aid. Representatives of the committee are directed to make a home visit before giving any individual assistance. Thrust upon the committee are those agonizing decisions as to who is to receive this lifesaving aid. Frau Bolz of the Wiesbaden office of Evangelisches Hilfswerk gives this illustration: "The Deanery of Herborn has received nineteen sacks of flour. With these nineteen sacks we have to help 34,227 persons in the area. This is impossible. Therefore, we have to select only those cases where the need is most urgent. The community, for example, must assist one hundred children of severely endangered health condition. But living in the same community are fifty old people who are sick and who are in danger of starvation without additional food. Who should receive the first help?"

It may be that Evangelisches Hilfswerk chose to distribute our twenty tons of Kansas flour, not through the local community committees, but directly to the joint child-feeding program of Greater Hesse. This is a co-operative enterprise in which all German relief agencies share in the feeding of 72,000 school children in eight cities. Our twenty tons of white flour will provide for 20,000 school children a large, nourishing 100-gram (238-calorie) roll or "brotchen" three times a week for a full month. The children tell us with delight that in all the school feeding the "brotchen" they like best—"It is better than cake!"

Letters of Appreciation

Daily there come thank-you letters from the grateful recipients of our gifts. We quote from only a few letters:

". . . our heartfelt thanks for the help which comes of Christian mutual love. These love-gifts lend us new confidence and strengthen our faith that the spirit of Christ's love transcends human passions and the will for reprisal."

"Mrs. F. is alone with her children. The husband and father is a prisoner of war in Stalingrad. All the years long she never lost courage. By a mistake of the authorities she received one ration-card more than to which she was entitled. The temptation to keep the card was great. But the mother succeeded in convincing the children of the wrong in keeping the card. Soon after the ration-card had been returned to the food office, the flour contribution arrived."

"The returnee had tears in his eyes. He said: 'You cannot know how much good this love does, especially if one has been pushed around for two years and has felt like a bad defendant who has no right to lead a human life. That my family would receive me with love, I expected. But that I should receive relief supplies from the former enemy-country, I feel humbled.'"

I READ OF WAR

I read of war, its horrors, glories, and spectacles.

My thirst for adventure was sated.

I had experienced it all vicariously.

Then I felt dull. I opened the Holy Book and found truth. Ah, truth, what is adventure beside thee?—Stanley Shenk.

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Thinking about Relief

In Holland

In our relief services we have felt that our efforts must be more than the mechanical and routine disbursement of material aid. We have talked about giving clothing-plus, and food-plus, implying that the "plus" is something of the spirit of Christ and the good news of the Gospel imparted by our attitudes and a few gestures or words which we may have opportunity to share with recipients of relief goods. This is as it should be, and it is necessary for the Christian relief workers to constantly be challenged by the larger and more basic needs of mankind. However, there is a subtle danger connected with this line of thought and action. It is this: When we are on the giving end, we are inclined to think of ourselves as the custodians of certain blessings and resources to be imparted to others and thus we become masters rather than servants. It is so easy for a foreign relief worker to take advantage of the favored position his appointment gives him and to live in the ivory tower of his own culture, background, and spiritual understanding. To be of real service the relief worker dare not take a condescending attitude; he must identify himself with the recipient. A condescending attitude negates any real Christian service. Only by placing himself in the place of the recipient will the relief worker be able to truly enter into the lives and experiences of the people he desires to help. Otherwise one's work is superficial. A sincere weeping with those that weep and rejoicing with those that rejoice provides a common level whereby the Spirit can work. Moving about in relief service one touches angels unawares and frequently finds individuals whose personal religious lives are rich and deep and who can tell somewhat of the spiritual values of suffering and hardship.

In the actual disbursement of relief goods it is necessary to go beyond the routine of distribution, and it is also necessary to go beyond an actual program of emergency relief. The time comes when it is very important to discontinue the provision of emergency relief. To continue too long is not only an unwise use of materials and personnel, but has an undesirable effect on the people. At such a period of transition the very practical question arises: Should the work be discontinued and workers leave for some more needy area, or should something be done to follow up the contacts established through the giving of emergency relief?

Our program in Holland has come to this transition period. Although the Dutch people have humbly received our proffered aid in the past, there is now a certain incongruous connotation about the word "relief." There are special areas where emergency relief is still needed—but the time has arrived to think in terms of terminating the relief program. The very practical question then comes: Should the end of our relief program mean the end of our work in Holland?

In a program of Christian service what comes after relief? Laboring on the field one feels that the work has only begun when emergency relief has ended. A foundation has been laid; a foundation upon which God's workmen may build Christian homes, churches, communities. In some of our relief fields missionary efforts are being built upon the relief foundation. What should be built upon the foundation which has been laid in Holland? Our greatest opportunity here is with our coreligionists, the Doopsgezinden, who are a fully organized Mennonite group with missionary and service projects themselves. Five hundred of our Russian Mennonite brethren are also in Holland and with them our interest must be one of brotherly assistance on both the material and spiritual level. With the Doopsgezinden our relations must be brotherly ones, mostly on the level of spiritual and social contact.

As we go into the succeeding stage—in technical terms we may call it "rehabilitation," but in Christian service we may call it "Christian mutual aid"—we will need to find the projects and the activities which will give us the opportunity to build upon the foundation. It is the opinion of the writer that the rehabilitation phase of our service program is even more difficult than emergency relief and that it requires the best of our abilities and the close leading of the Lord. As we go through this transition period in Holland and as changes are in progress we earnestly desire the prayers of our friends and loved ones, the church at home.—Irvin B. Horst.

The truth of God's Word is not affected by man's failure to comprehend.—Daniel Kauffman

Diseases and Puerto Rico

By John Driver

Volumes have been written, extensive surveys and studies made, and the Government Health Department has even set up elaborate health mechanisms, but still the disease problems of Puerto Rico go on from year to year basically the same, and the health of the island's people has not been improved to any great extent. True, history has seen the defeat of two great killers: smallpox and yellow fever. But still rampant on the island are intestinal diseases which kill 415.5 persons per 100,000 population, and respiratory diseases, including tuberculosis and pneumonia. Nephritis, malaria, syphilis, and dysentery are many times more prevalent than in the continental U.S. On the continent, the chief causes of death are degenerative diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, and cerebral hemorrhage, whereas on the island, death, caused mostly by contagious diseases, comes at a much earlier age.

Enteritis, the greatest killer, is produced by microorganisms carried in food and water. The prevalence of intestinal disease in Puerto Rico is not surprising since the majority of the people procure their water from streams or cisterns which are polluted by human wastes. Even water supplied by municipal pumping plants is very often polluted. Food sources are often insanitary and many times may best be described by the word "filthy." To add to this dilemma the people are often weakened by malnutrition and succumb easily to the disease. Malnutrition largely accounts for the infant mortality rate which is more than double that of the U.S. In countless cases children under two years of age are given the same poorly balanced ration of rice, beans, dried codfish, and coffee which their parents eat.

It has been estimated that as many as three fourths of the families have no sanitary means of disposing of human excrement. This fact accounts for the prevalence of "anemia" caused by hookworm. The embryonic hookworm is excreted and remains upon the damp ground until a barefooted person walks that way. The tiny larva then fastens itself to the skin of the feet, burrows through the skin, makes its way through the blood stream, the lungs, the throat and stomach, to the intestine. In the small intestine it fastens itself to the intestinal wall and there does its damage, gradually weakening the victim until he loses his resistance.

Tests made show that in rural areas as many as ninety per cent of the children are infected with hookworm. The case of Maria is typical of thousands which are on the island. Maria is a girl sixteen years of age. Her mother is a widow. Her father died two years ago of "a disease of the chest." She became ill, and on examination it was found that Maria now has moderately advanced tuberculosis with cavitation. Almost invariably there is a history of tuberculosis in the family, which shows the results of ignorance of the disease and its treatment. One woman who came to the hospital was from a family in which seven persons had died of tuberculosis. Maria's home is a wooden shack about fifteen feet square located in the slum section of Aibonito. Maria sleeps on the only bed because she is sick. Her mother, sister, brother, and two nieces sleep either in a hammock or on the floor in the same room. The sister is at the present time looking for work, but cannot find employment. The family receives $7.50 monthly from a public welfare organization. Beyond this they are at the grace of their neighbors who sometimes give them food, but since the financial condition of the neighbors is nearly the same, the income from this source is very meager.

The health problem of the island is not exclusively a medical one, but rather a tangled snare of medical problems, economics, ignorance, and so forth. In our sanitation project we cannot hope to stamp out hookworm and supply every family with sanitary latrines. But we have helped and are helping some families to better living by installing latrines and giving information and treatment in our own hospital, by securing sanatorium treatment where possible, and by teaching the patients and families with whom we come in contact that tuberculosis is a disease which can be both prevented and cured.

We are often discouraged with the comparatively small amount of good we are able to do. However, we are reminded of Christ's earthly ministry. After His ascension the poor and the infirm were still here, but as long as He walked in human form in this world of suffering He healed and comforted those about Him.

La Fortaleza
San Juan, Puerto Rico
October 16, 1946

Mr. Harry E. Martens
Mennonite Central Committee
Akron, Pennsylvania

Dear Mr. Martens:

With the most pleasant impressions still fresh in my mind of my visit to La Plata in which I saw and judged the work accomplished by the workers of your organization, I take pleasure in extending to you the most cordial greeting.

I hope that you had a restful trip on the boat to New York and that everything is fine with you. The party that saw you off at the pier and myself had the most agreeable chat as the boat pulled out into the bay.

Mr. Driver, the social worker, furnished me through Dr. Amstutz the most complete report on two cases of malnutrition which I saw at the hospital. Already, through the kindness of Mr. and Mrs. Haas who made funds available for a milk station, a rural milk station is being established at the barrio where one of these malnutrition cases came from. This will be a help to the children in that section. The members of the Mennonite camp at La Plata were visibly gratified when they heard about this new milk station.

The co-operation of the people living in the La Plata Valley to the members of the group, I think, goes well to show the appreciation that those people have toward the fine group of citizens who are helping them. Talking to a family in the community, they told me that it seemed to them that the members of your group . . . "must have come from heaven."

Another family spoke to me abhorring of war, yet expressing their fears that with the end of hostilities the Mennonite camp might move back to the States, leaving them destitute of their service.

Utterances like these carry a touch which it is difficult to picture to other people as you have to live them to appreciate the emotion and full meaning.

I hope you have a pleasant stay in the States and hoping to see you on your return, I am

Sincerely yours,

Jesus T. Pinero
Governor

(The above letter from the Governor of Puerto Rico was sent to Harry E. Martens, Ex-director of the M.C.C. Unit at La Plata, soon after his return to the States. The unit at present consists of forty-two workers and is under the direction of Melvin Lauver.)

Notes From the Field

Paraguay

We started farm making in the beginning of August; so we had two months' time to go before the beginning of seeding operations in the colony. This is not much time when you have to chop the farm out of the bush and the house out of the mud. But the place is looking more like a farm all the time. The main survey has been completed. There remains some detailed work in this line to do yet. The well and tent were made in August. The Indians have been clearing bush for two months and we have had from twelve to fifteen of them at it. They still have a month or two to go to finish their job, but at present they are on their "holidays." They have been busy making Palo Santo posts during the last while. We need about 1,350. They have made about 500 so far. A short row of posts has already been set and we have sufficient wire to finish five strands around fifty acres.—Menno Klassen.

France

Over one million homes have been destroyed in France during the last war, not including the 250,000 public buildings. These losses have been estimated at 4,893 billion francs. After so many years of agony the people of France are seeking for peace, but still more they are seeking to rebuild their homes which were shattered by wartime destruction. The home-loving French are clearing away rubble, preparatory to rebuilding. Winter is approaching and reconstruction has moved very slowly thus far. Ever since the defeat of Germany, France hoped to start reconstructing, but vast quantities of materials are needed for rebuilding and since France is suffering an acute coal shortage these materials cannot be supplied. Coal is still the key to the reconstruction of France; the problem of transportation of labor and materials. Besides all these difficulties, there are still thousands of unexplored mines in France making operations very difficult in these areas. Under such conditions the housing problem is acute. Thousands of families resorted to rudely constructed wooden barracks which are very inadequate. Under such prevailing conditions I feel that we have something to contribute in a very definite manner.

During October I visited the RTU on Walcheren Island and was very much impressed by the work the boys are doing there. It was a real challenge to see the happy expressions on the faces of those who were now moved back into their homes which the boys built for them. We must remember that we may not see the fruits of our labor presently. After all, we are building houses, which is something material. It is something we can feel and touch. It is something concrete, but when these families are moved back into the house, the material becomes spiritual. A home is established again. A home is a thing of the spirit. These boys are building houses which make a home possible. It is then that the fruit of their efforts is revealed "In the name of Christ." I was also impressed by the excellent group morale which I sensed very keenly. We held an informal camp meeting in which we discussed both the pro and con of their contribution to the relief program. Suggestions were offered regarding the general improvement of their program. I went out on the project with the boys a few days and worked with them. I hope the boys will continue the good work which they have so well begun.—Orlo Goering.

Walcheren Island

We had an electrician from Zoutelude to do some wiring in one of our unit houses. I had the privilege of helping him. I couldn't speak much Dutch and he couldn't speak much English, but we got along just fine. The last day we worked together he told me this, "I wish we could work together and wire all the houses in this community." He was taken to Germany and forced to work there for two years during the occupation. My experiences in relief work have been great so far. Friends, brothers, and sisters, I must tell you that we are receiving more from the many friends in Holland than we can give them.—Enos Bontrager.

The evangelistic work and church cultivation which has been the primary concern of missions must continue to be its primary concern. It is fundamental and the hope for all progress.—S. F. Pannabecker

Peace Notes

A Case of Early Conscientious Objection

. . . there is no record up to the year 170 A.D. of a single Christian soldier. Christians did not voluntarily enlist, because of several reasons. One of these was that the soldier was required to sacrifice to idols and also to worship to the ruler. This his faith forbade him to do, for he might worship God only. Another reason for declining military service was that he could not perform the duties of a soldier without transgressing the law of love to which loyalty to Jesus Christ bound him.

When the number of Christians multiplied, compulsory military service seems to have been by degrees increasingly resorted to, in order to obtain men for service. By this heartless procedure young Christian men, of positive convictions opposed to military service, were also swept into the army, contrary to their will. Some of these refused to serve in the ranks, and were ruthlessly dealt with under the brutal military law.

A conspicuous case is that of Maximilianus, an African youth, a Christian from Numidia who had just attained the age of twenty-one years. This young man had been brought before the magistrates for enlistment into the army by his own father, Fabius Voctor, who presented him as a sufficient and legal recruit. This was in the year 295 A.D. Having been brought before Dion, the proconsul of Africa, he refused to serve or accept the soldier's badge, saying repeatedly that he could not do so because he was a Christian and served Christ. In vain Dion tried to overcome his objections. He persisted in declaring that his conscience would not permit him to embrace the profession of a soldier. It is plain from Maximilianus' statements that his objection to serving was primarily if not solely to the murderous business of military activities. When it was urged that there were Christians in other armies, he replied: "They know what is fitting for them: but I am a Christian; I can do no evil." As he was inflexible in his decision, nothing more remained to do. He was sentenced and suffered the death penalty. His body was taken to Carthage and buried near the tomb of the church-father Cyprian. (War Peace Amity, by Krehbiel)

GOD, GIVE US MEN

God, give us men! A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands;
Men whom the lust of office does not kill;
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
Men who possess opinions and a will;
Men who have honor; men who will not lie.

. . . . . .

Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog
In public duty, and in private thinking;
For while the rabble, with their thumb-worn creeds,
Their large professions and their little deeds,
Mingle in selfish strife, lo! Freedom weeps,
Wrong rules the land and waiting Justice sleeps.

—Josiah Holland.

FOREIGN CENTERS AND PERSONNEL

PARAGUAY 23

Comite Central Mennonita
25 de Noviembre 371
Casilla de Correo No. 166
Asuncion, Paraguay
South America

PUERTO RICO 42

La Plata
Puerto Rico

ITALY 14

Mennonite Service Unit
Les Monnets
Luserna San Giovanni
(Torino)
Italy

ETHIOPIA 12

Mennonite Hospital
Nazareth (Hadama)
via Addis Ababa
Ethiopia, Africa

INDIA 11

% Lee Memorial Mission
13 Wellington Square
Calcutta, India

CHINA 28

Mennonite Central Committee
Canadian Church Mission
South Suburb, Haifeng
Honan, China

PHILIPPINE ISLANDS 11

Vigan Christian Hospital
Box 52
Vigan, Ilocos Sur
Philippine Islands

DENMARK 2

Box 249 Vesterbro Post Kontor
Copenhagen, V, Denmark

GERMANY

(Addresses are varied and temporary)

AUSTRIA 1

USFA HQ
Welfare Division
AFSC, APO, % Postmaster
New York, New York

FRANCE 27

Secours Mennonite aus Enfants
11 Impasse de la Tranchee
Chalon-sur-Saone (S.-et-L)
France

BELGIUM 7

6 Rue Jean Heymans
Brussels 2,
Belgium

SWITZERLAND 4

Birkenstrasse 11
Post Office Box 48
Basel 9, Switzerland

HOLLAND 27

Mennonite Central Comite
Koningslaan 58
Amsterdam, Holland